



# Seeing the Community in Sustainable Futures: Local Communities, Local Television and Climate Action

SustainET Talk 9 November 2022

# Today

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- How do we think and talk about climate change?
- Alternative conceptualisations to bring about change
- Role of media in facilitating change



# So how do we talk about climate change

[António Guterres] said the world faced a stark choice over the next fortnight of talks: either developed and developing countries working together to make a “historic pact” that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and set the world on a low-carbon path – or failure, which would bring climate breakdown and catastrophe. (*The Guardian*, 07/11/22)

**Tackling climate change will require world leaders to take action on a global level.** But as individuals we also contribute to warming emissions. Here are some things you can do to reduce your personal impact. (BBC News, 07/11/22)

# Central points:

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- Politicians and governments need to develop policy to curb climate change
- Transferring responsibility to politicians
- Creating an element of disempowerment
- But these are the things people can do: appealing to the neoliberal consumer-individual
- But also paternalist: this is what you can/have to do



# To conclude

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- Either power is imagined to sit at the top, and the rest cannot do anything
- Or
- Power sits at the top and people have to be told what to do



# Media and Discourses about Climate Change

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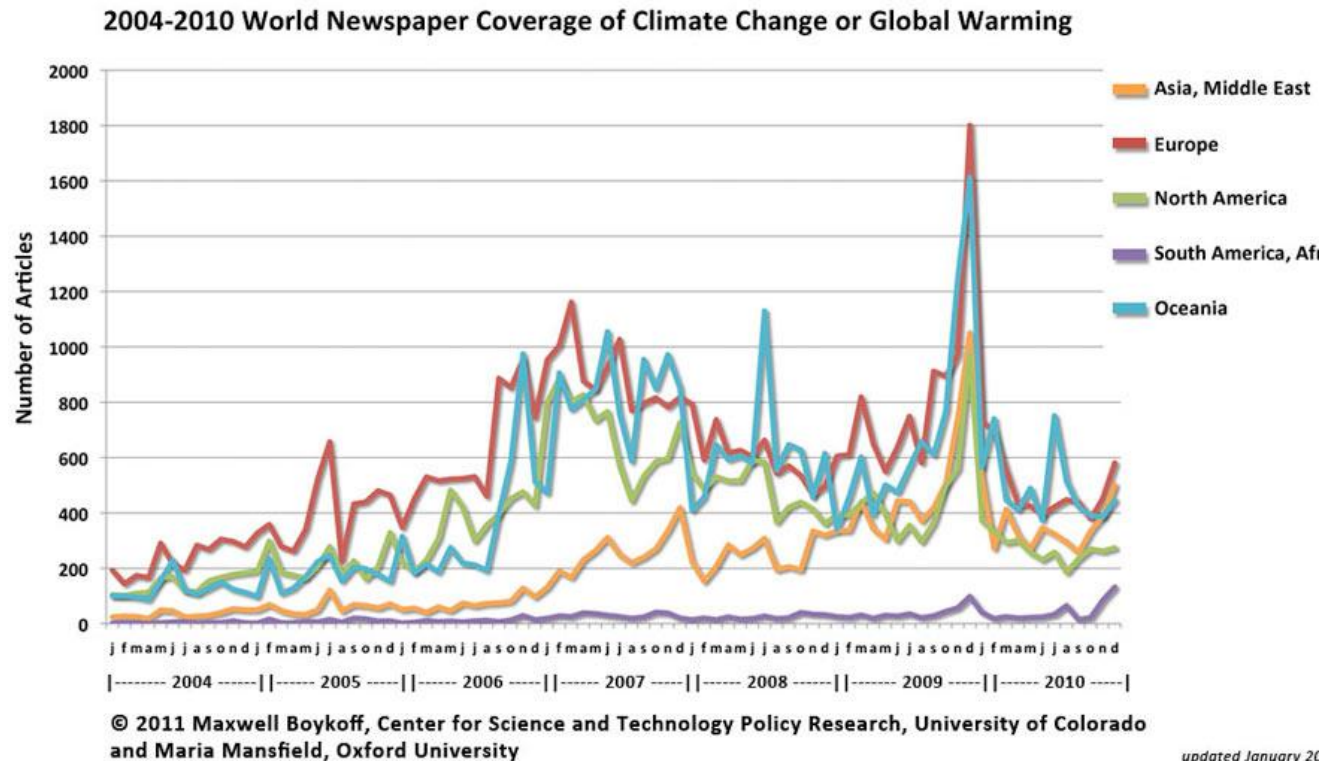
- Helplessness inducing images of far away catastrophes (wild fires, drowning polar bears, see Braasch, 2013)
- Too much credence given to discourses of doubt (Doyle, 2011)
- How to inspire people to change? (Smith, 2022; Doyle, 2011)
- But also: Media themselves are not environmentally sustainable (Maxwell and Miller, 2012)



from  
**2016**

**The  
Guardian**

# So problems



- Discourses of climate change are too top down
- The media do not know how to tell stories about climate change and inspire change

# So, let me do an experiment



- In the chat, tell me something about climate action that you are doing. How does it relate to people you know?



# Communities!



- A lot of climate action conducted by grassroots community groups
- Friends of the Earth
- Extinction Rebellion
- LitterClear
- Wavertree Garden Suburb in Bloom
  
- It's the Communities who are doing it!

Let me  
introduce...



# Research Project 'Community-led Television, Local Voice and Climate Action'

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Climate Assemblies
- Filmed them, as well as local climate action
- Screened to community
- Questionnaire
  
- Collaboration between Edge Hill University, University of Liverpool, Love Wavertree CIC and British Academy



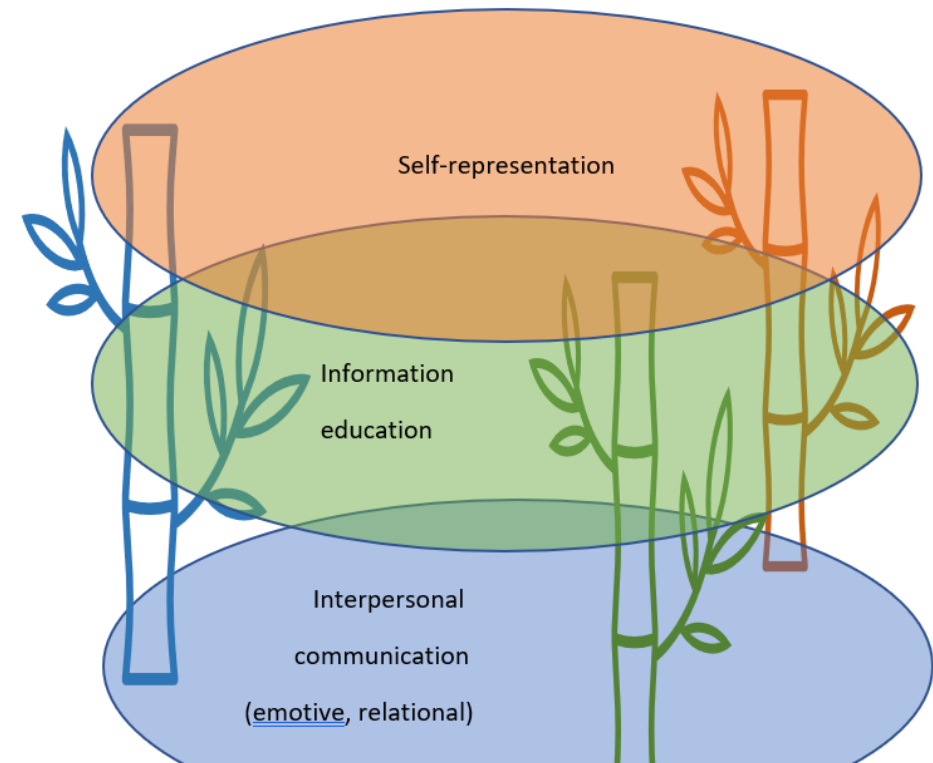
# Key findings

- Issues of climate change go hand in hand with
- Issues of social justice go hand in hand with
- Issues of community
  
- Better insulated homes are good for the environment, good for people living in them (health and energy costs) but to make it equitable requires a community response



# The Sustainable Community

- Three branches of sustainable community held up by three layers of communicative facilitation
- The three branches are:
  - **Community** (sense of belonging, identity, collective action)
  - **Climate justice** (net zero, sustainability, climate action)
  - **Social equality and inclusion** (health, poverty, social exclusion)



# Three levels of communication required



- **Face-to-face interaction**
  - Need for spaces that local communities can use to meet, including high streets, pubs, restaurants and venues
- **Information and education**
  - Key founding principles of Reithian public service ethos: broadcasting should 'inform, educate and entertain'
- **Self-representation**
  - Central to remits of the BBC (represent diverse communities across all of the UK's nations and regions) and Channel 4 (champion marginalised voices)



# Information and Education

- Assemblies: issues of knowledge gaps in local communities identified
- But also solutions: knowledge of groups that have that knowledge
- Knowledge sharing as central theme
  
- Assembly participants did not want to have to find that information. They wanted to have that delivered to their door in a directory (versus digital myth of online agency; Webster, 2017)
- Post-screening survey: participants emphasised their learning as a key positive of viewing programmes: '[The programmes are] great for communicating what's going on in [the] local area and how we can get involved'

# Self-Representation

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- Role of giving voice to the marginalised (Malik et al, 2017)
- Role of affect: positive emotions were clearly expressed in post-screening survey
- Use of words such as 'community' and 'positive' points to connection of sense of community, validation and other positive emotions
- 'There's lots of things people can do, and it looks easier to do things together [rather] than alone'





# So – what to take away

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- Recognise the efforts of local communities and celebrate them
- Consider how issues of community belonging, social and climate justice go hand in hand
- Media, particularly when they follow key ideas of public service broadcasting, can be central in supporting local communities to grow in their resilience and sustainability



# Thank you!

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